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ABSTRACT

The National Center for the Accelerated Schools Project at Stanford University has recognized that district-level change is necessary if changes at accelerated schools are to gain permanence and become widespread. The Center has therefore initiated a research and development project to design a set of models on which districts can reconstitute themselves as accelerated districts. These districts will support and perhaps even mirror their accelerated schools in their guiding philosophy and organization. This paper describes the Center's effort to develop models of accelerated districts, including the history of and rationale for accelerated schools. It also describes the Center's first attempt at school-district transformation, a collaboration with San Jose Unified School District (California). The San Jose experience taught participants the following lessons: (1) include all stakeholders in the "buy-in" decision; (2) design a fully developed model before implementation; (3) accurately assess needed and available resources; (4) build trust and belief among participants; (5) address external and internal politics; and (6) identify effective forms of communication. Recent accomplishments of the Center include the development of three organizational models for district implementation and a plan for creating a district design team. (Contains 15 references.) (LMI)

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Accelerated Districts – The Next Step
A Summary of Research and Design

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April 1995

This paper was prepared for and presented at the American Education Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting in San Francisco, California (April, 1995).

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I. Introduction

Across the country there are stories of successful changes and major reforms in public schools. Among schools in the accelerated schools movement alone, there are stories from dozens of schools that describe both successful and important changes that have resulted from their engagement in the accelerated schools transformation process. Yet while these types of changes have taken place at the school site level, there is little evidence that school districts have chosen to take the same big steps, to reorganize their own operations so they support and complement the reforms that are taking place in schools.

The National Center for the Accelerated Schools Project at Stanford University has recognized that this type of district-level change is necessary if the changes at schools are to gain permanence and to become widespread. An important and relevant lesson has stood out from the National Center's work with hundreds of accelerated schools and in districts across the nation over the last nine years: leadership and ongoing support at the district level is essential for change to take hold and remain in schools. If changes made by accelerated school communities are to be fully successful and lasting, then accelerated school communities need to be partnered with districts that both *support and complement* these schools. By "support," we mean districts that will provide the necessary supportive services to accelerated schools such as flexibility in time schedules, and sensitivity to the specific and professed needs of accelerated schools. By "complement" we mean districts that are actually committed to transforming their own operations so that they become the natural partner or counterpart to accelerated schools -- and are guided by the same philosophy and an analogous process for change.

The National Center for the Accelerated Schools Project has therefore initiated a research and development project to design a set of models for districts to be able to reconstitute themselves as "accelerated districts." These districts will support and perhaps even mirror their accelerated schools in their guiding philosophy and organization. For the

first time, *a philosophy and process for change in classrooms and schools will be linked to reform at the next level -- to reform of districts.*

In this paper we describe the National Center's effort to develop these models of accelerated districts, beginning in section II with rationale for this effort. In sections III, IV and V we describe the results of our work to date; and in the final section we describe our intended steps over the next few years.

II. Accelerated Schools and Experiences with Districts

Brief History

In the mid 1980's, the National Center began to study remedial programs for 'at risk' children. This study resulted in work with a small group of schools to try an alternative strategy of enriched or 'accelerated' curricula with this group of students. During the last ten years, the National Center has developed an increasingly refined philosophy and process to engage staff, parents and students in transforming their school communities into places where all children have equal opportunity to achieve at high levels, using a variety of powerful learning techniques. Over the same time, the number of accelerated schools has grown to about 700 in 37 states. Details of the history of the Accelerated Schools movement, the philosophy and process, and the work of the National Center can be found in other writings (Hopfenberg, et al, 1993; Levin, 1995).

As the project has grown, National Center staff have become increasingly aware of the important roles that school districts, often called 'district offices,' play in the implementation of the accelerated schools philosophy and process at their schools. In many instances districts have provided important support that has strengthened the implementation process at their accelerated schools. Other district offices, though, have impeded or even halted the implementation of the accelerated schools philosophy and process at schools in both inadvertent and overt ways. In the following section we detail some of the ways that districts have both helped and hindered the implementation of the

accelerated schools philosophy and process in schools. However, it should be noted that even while many districts have demonstrated important support for their accelerated schools, we have seen no evidence of any district that has actively set about to transform its own operations to complement this type of work in their schools. This type of comprehensive district transformation is the ultimate goal of the research and design effort described in this paper. The examples which detail how districts support or hinder the progress of accelerated schools come from school and district staff and others across the country who either work in or with accelerated schools.

How Districts Support Accelerated Schools

District offices have been supportive of the work of accelerated schools in several important ways. First, a major factor in the success of many schools has been the commitment of their districts to hire coaches for their accelerated schools with sufficient time and skills to be effective. Talented coaches are essential to the ability of new accelerated schools to start out properly, and then to continue to move successfully through the process. Districts also pay for the training of these coaches, who need information and knowledge in order to serve as both facilitators and trainers to the schools. In response to the need of accelerated schools, supportive districts have changed job descriptions and schedules to enable their coaches to be as productive and effective as possible.

Several districts have also nurtured relationships with their accelerated schools to improve communication and to be more responsive to the unique needs of these schools. For example, some have instituted district-level 'Steering Committees' to support the accelerated schools in the district. District personnel, coaches, and accelerated school representatives serve on these committees, which meet monthly to address communication, articulation, improvement, and networking issues regarding the accelerated schools. These committees have helped remove obstacles in the paths of accelerated schools, such as facilitating the use of waivers from district rules.

Other ways districts have supported accelerated schools is by granting funds and other resources, as well as through permitting flexibility with release time, schedules, and staff development for accelerated schools. This has included districts paying for extra staff development days for accelerated schools so they could receive training; and negotiating with unions to permit banking time, enabling accelerated schools to create their own staff development time.

Other districts have recognized the importance of rewarding their successful accelerated schools, by publicizing the positive results of these schools, and advertising the fact that accelerated schools exist in those districts. Still other districts have recognized the value in assuring that top leadership understand what their accelerated schools are doing through participation in accelerated schools activities, attending training at the National Center, visiting school sites and personally and publicly supporting accelerated schools. The results of these efforts is that accelerated schools feel supported in their change efforts, and are willing to try more creative projects as they gain confidence that the process can be permanent in their schools and supported by their districts. This confidence is further heightened in cases where districts themselves have emphasized change or transformation. In these cases, the districts have "laid the foundation and the ground work for easy progress in the Accelerated Schools model" (Survey Data, 1995).

The potentially positive effect of district level work on accelerated schools is nicely summarized by the following quote:

> "We have found that in districts where central office personnel is supportive, the process moves much faster. This confirms the fact that awareness, understanding, and attitude of the district is integral to the future success and longevity of Accelerated Schools" (Survey Data, 1995).

How Districts Hinder the Progress of Accelerated Schools

While some districts have demonstrated tangible and valuable support of their accelerated schools, others have done little or nothing to support these schools. Because of

the unusual needs of accelerated schools, this lack of support often results in slower progress of accelerated schools through the process, as school communities worry that their desire to change is not valued by the district. For example, a crucial aspect of the accelerated schools model is that every school has a coach to help them through the process. Unfortunately, some districts have not seen this coaching as a priority. As a result, they have not adequately funded coaches so they have enough time to work effectively with accelerated schools.

Other districts have adopted a "wait and see" attitude, because they feel that the Accelerated Schools model is not a proven success in their districts. A representative from one of these districts indicated that,

> "a track record for effectiveness needs to be proven before the district will whole-heartedly support the model and [the two pilot] schools" (Survey Data, 1995).

The result of this lack of understanding is that individual accelerated school communities hold back from being truly innovative, because they are unsure of the support they will receive from the district office. In another district, a representative pointed out that the district will offer more support when more schools indicate that they are committed to the accelerated schools philosophy and process (Survey Data, 1995). The view of these districts seems to be that support comes from the district once accelerated schools have demonstrated that they can be successful *absent* support from the district. While the logic of this reasoning is a bit confusing to say the least, it has left these accelerated schools with the extra job of convincing their districts of the merit of their work.

When districts do not take action, school district personnel remain untrained or generally uninformed about accelerated schools. This lack of information manifests itself in several ways: In some districts, district staff may consider the goals of school based management, but do not consider the participatory structure of their accelerated schools, and how their restructuring can be coordinated with the district goals of greater autonomy for sites. In other districts, there is a general resistance on the part of some staff to having

"outside experts tell them what to do" (Survey Data, 1995), including accelerated schools coaches, who are representing the needs and interests of their schools. There has been little effort on the part of leadership in some districts to proactively address questions of release time for staff, and flexibility in the use of staff development time that is crucial to the time intensive work of accelerated school communities. This lack of effort and support on the part of districts has compelled some accelerated schools to carry out their efforts within district imposed, and perhaps unnecessary constraints, severely limiting their ability to grow with the model. Again, school staff with district personnel that are uninformed or unwilling to learn about accelerated schools face the double task of transforming their schools, while also trying to make their districts aware and supportive of what they are doing.

While district inaction can make extra work for accelerated schools, sometimes district *action* causes even bigger problems. In one example, one district mandated that some of their schools become accelerated schools, a decision that ran counter to the whole notion of school buy-in and choice. This unfortunate decision resulted in problematic buy-in by the schools, as expressed by a survey response by a coach in the district (Survey Data, 1995):

> "Our district made some decisions that hurt the credibility of the ASP. The accelerated schools literature says that schools should explore and decide to buy-into the model on their own, but we were basically mandated to use it for re-structuring. Our school is still feeling the fallout from this top-down decision, as it is hard to get people to participate in various accelerated schools activities, because they don't feel they ever had a choice about it" (Survey Data, 1995).

Other districts have adopted many projects and initiatives simultaneously, so that accelerated schools have ended up competing for resources and recognition. As an example which typifies many districts, one district adopted several models for school restructuring at the same time. The result has been both confusion and distraction among school personnel at all schools including accelerated schools, as they have had to compete

for resources from the district to support their restructuring efforts, and struggle to be understood amidst all the other reforms.

In other cases, there has been a significant degree of turnover among key personnel at the district and/or school level. While turnover of key leadership positions is not unusual in school districts, this activity promotes an atmosphere of instability and uncertainty. Consider the case of one district where a new superintendent has been slow to endorse and approve the continuation of the Accelerated Schools Program. A respondent from this district described what happened, saying,

> "This [turnover] has seriously affected our ability to move forward with the necessary release time for staff development. He [the new superintendent] also does not like the term "Accelerated Schools" and doesn't want our two sites to use that terminology. This is beginning to dampen the enthusiasm of our two sites" (Survey Data, 1995).

A similar feeling of uncertainty was reflected in the comment of another respondent, who described how a similar change took place in her district:

> "The district lead for the Accelerated Schools Program has left the district. This leaves us with little or no district support. There is the feeling of little support at the moment; however, as someone comes into her position, maybe support will be reinstated" (Survey Data, 1995).

Perhaps the biggest problem affecting accelerated schools in terms of staff turnover has to do with the transfer of principals away from accelerated schools. Leadership and support of principals is essential for implementing the philosophy and process; but many districts have generally ignored this criterion in decisions to transfer their accelerated schools principals to other schools. New principals who then come to the accelerated schools are often only superficially acquainted with the accelerated schools philosophy and process that is being implemented in their new schools. They are often completely unaware of the participatory nature of decision-making in accelerated schools — involving staff, parents and others — and do not understand that the entire school community will have a

say in decisions made in their schools. It then becomes necessary for the school community to try to convince new principals that accelerated schools are a good idea. Sometimes these efforts are to no avail, and the process stops dead in its tracks in these schools, despite all the work the school has done prior to the arrival of the new principal.

Results of These Experiences

The National Center began to realize both the positive and negative influence districts can have on school reform during our earliest work in creating accelerated schools. By the late 1980's, leadership at the National Center began to consider the relevance of changing districts to support accelerated schools. The National Center began to explore the possibility of district change in an initial concept paper in 1989, and later with an application to the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC) in 1991 to study district change.

However, it was not until the Summer of 1993 that the National Center first made a concerted effort to work with a school district to transform that districts' own operations. We had, by this time, sufficiently recognized that districts needed to go beyond merely 'supporting' their accelerated schools, for this district support is just as fragile as the changes made in accelerated schools. Superintendents who support accelerated schools can leave as easily as principals in accelerated schools, and their absence can have a similarly negative impact. To try and change this fragility, we became committed to developing a model of change by which districts could alter their decision-making structure, and ultimately their organization and functions, through a process that was analogous to the democratic decision-making of accelerated schools.

The goal of this effort was and continues to be an institutionalization of the accelerated schools philosophy and an analogous 'accelerated district' process in school districts. With such institutionalization, we will not have to rely on the good will of individuals like understanding superintendents to get basic levels of support for accelerated

schools. Instead, the staff of 'accelerated districts' will take part in a process similar to that of their accelerated schools, whereby all stakeholders have a voice. We expect the adoption of an 'accelerated district' model to have two important consequences. First, district staff will more clearly understand the needs of accelerated schools, and the ways that these schools should be supported to insure their success. More importantly though, we expect that 'accelerated districts' *can perform better*. By this we mean that districts that adopt the accelerated schools philosophy and use an analogous process will make better decisions about the content of their work, and how they should prioritize and organize that work. This will go beyond how they provide direct services to their schools, to include other district functions such as compliance reporting, and assessment of programs. In the next section we briefly describe our first intensive experience with district transformation, as well as important lessons learned from this work.

III. A First Attempt at District Transformation -- Collaboration with the San Jose Unified School District

History of the Collaboration

The National Center has a history of collaboration with the San Jose Unified School District dating back to 1989 and the establishment of the nation's first accelerated middle school. Two district elementary schools later became accelerated schools, and all three have received coaching from National Center staff. Discussions between the new district superintendent and National Center leadership in the Summer of 1993 led to the idea of transforming the district into the first "accelerated district." For the next year, National Center staff and a team from the district developed plans and organized activities to initiate this transformation.

Several successful by-products resulted from the National Center's year-long collaboration with San Jose. Among these activities were two half day meetings with the entire district staff to build awareness and foster buy-in of district transformation. These

meetings represented the first time that all staff, including classified workers were asked for *their* opinions on basic questions of district organization and mission. In addition, National Center staff and district leadership met with staff in a variety of district departments to further develop an understanding of their roles in a transforming district.

Most importantly, the National Center and district leadership developed and established the San Jose Unified "Committee of 100," a representative group of all stakeholders in the district, designed to replicate the 'school as a whole' forum found in accelerated schools. Members of this group included parents, students, school and district staff, and community and business leadership from San Jose. This group met for two full days in May 1994, and became the vehicle for communicating interests of the various stake holders into the transformation process during the Summer, 1994.

Nonetheless, our collaboration with San Jose on district transformation had some important and eventually insurmountable challenges. First, although the National Center had years of experience in school change, our experience with district change was quite limited. We did not have the type of refined models for districts that we had developed for accelerated elementary and middle schools. As a result, we had initially conceived that the project would have time built in for research and to collaboratively develop a model with district practitioners. However, the momentum of our collaboration compelled us to attempt implementation without a refined model, resulting in uncertainty at certain points about how to proceed. And, as we developed a model that was faithful to the philosophy and process in schools, both groups quickly realized that the resources required for this type of district transformation might be greater than either could provide at that time. In short, although the San Jose collaboration provided an opportunity to test the idea of district transformation, we did not have yet have the capacity, either in terms of knowledge or resources, to work with a district to carry out this type of transformation

At the same time, both groups also recognized that buy-in and commitment to this type of change process may not have been sufficient across the district to sustain this type

of change. District leadership felt pressure to create quick, visible results, which ran counter to the accelerated schools philosophy of thoughtful, systematic and sustainable change. Thus even district leadership appeared equivocal about creating and sustaining a change process that was analogous to that of accelerated schools. The district could not muster the resources to overcome these challenges, and it was clear by August 1994 to both National Center and district leadership that we needed to reassess continuing the project. At this point we mutually and amicably agreed to step back from district transformation in San Jose. At the same time we have maintained collaboration with the district on other projects, including an effort to create more accelerated middle schools in the district, and exploring partnerships in the areas of powerful learning, and education technology.

Lessons from the San Jose Experience

It should be noted that both the San Jose district leadership and the National Center view the collaboration as a fruitful learning experience. The district continues to mobilize the Committee of 100 on its own around specific district reform efforts. In addition we have spent a good deal of time reflecting upon and synthesizing the important lessons that have emerged from the collaboration. These lessons have provided the foundation for our most recent research and design work. Here is a brief summary of these lessons, categorized in six primary areas.

Buy-in

- From our previous experience, we have learned that 'buy-in' and commitment to the accelerated schools model involving the entire school community, is a crucial first step of the accelerated school transformation process at the school site (Keller, 1995). If a district is to undertake a full-scale transformation, then an equal level of comprehensive buy-in is necessary to make sure all stakeholders have a voice in the decision. If all

employees, parents and staff in the district are to be involved in the transformation, there needs to be ownership and commitment from all stakeholders.

Design and Approach to Systemic Change

- By presenting a fully developed model, designed side-by-side with district practitioners before attempting implementation, assumptions and expectations will be clear and explicit to all parties involved. This will also help determine the amount of coaching and resources necessary.
- In terms of the design of the model itself, it is important to realize that sometimes, departmental divisions create "districts within districts," and that we need to think of a way to reach all the levels and areas of the district office.
- We also need several models of the "Accelerated District" that could accommodate each district's unique situation, their external pressures and the political natures, which we recognize as measurably higher than that of most schools.
- We need to find ways to reach out to the whole community, including both those who are powerful and those who marginalized by the district leadership, thus building coalitions amongst many facets of the district.

Resources: Personnel, Time and Funds

- As we approach any district transformation model, we need to accurately assess the resource needs of the project, and the resources that are available, in order to help assure project success. Most likely there will be a need to hire full time people, committed to this model and to the transformation project, so that competing projects and distractions do not preclude their involvement.
- However, any design should assume limited resources, as this is basically a given for most, if not all, districts.

Trust and Belief in the Project

- People in school districts often view new projects (such as accelerated schools and district transformation) as "passing phases." It is the history of educational reform, that many projects have been short-lived and as a result, district employees have learned to be jaded about new efforts or approaches. We need to think about how to use the accelerated schools philosophy and process to try and build trust in the continuing nature of a transformation project, and between groups in the district.

Politics

- Clearly, external political pressures are a reality in districts, and leadership of districts must be able to negotiate this political environment effectively in order to be successful. There is a need to address these realities directly (e.g. working with the union leadership, developing parent and community support, preparing in advance for the concerns of specific groups). In addition, there are internal politics that increase with the size of the organization. Any model needs to be sensitive to both types of politics.

Communication

- As part of the initial pre-buy-in and implementation phase, we should assess what forms of communication are most effective in the organization. The accelerated schools philosophy and process at the school level explicitly heightens the importance of communication not only with staff, but also with parents and students and the same will be necessary on the district level. It is important to learn about the communication vehicles of a district, including their internal e-mail, parent newsletters, etc. Then, there is a need to figure out how best to help district staff refine and improve how they communicate, so that these communication mechanisms can best support change.

- The National Center needs to work directly with the transforming district community using clear, understandable and frequent communication, gathering information about the preferred forms of communication, how some projects get done, and the politics of the district.

The San Jose experience offered these general lessons regarding both the substance and process of district transformation models. These lessons have provided a rich, experience-based foundation for our subsequent district research and design activities. In the next section, we outline the steps that we have taken since the end of our district transformation collaboration with San Jose in August, 1994.

IV. Recent work: District Transformation Research and Design

Since August, 1994, we have been engaged in a variety of research activities to further our understanding of the process of district change and work towards the design of accelerated district models. Activities during this past Fall and Winter set the stage for a two day conference we held in April 1995 with representatives from innovative school districts across the country to discuss the possibilities for district transformation. We next describe the set of activities leading up to this conference, and then the two day conference and its results.

Experiences with Districts Across the Country

Our work with districts to date has underscored the need to assure that our models are firmly grounded in the realities of school districts and their operations as they currently stand. To this end, we have gathered and synthesized key lessons from our experiences with districts around the country. Many of the experiences that we described in section II of this paper are a result of this synthesis of lessons from nearly ten years of work with districts. These lessons focus primarily on the degree to which districts have supported the

work of their accelerated schools. We have also conducted research into how districts have carried out their own district reform efforts, in addition to their specific support (or lack of support) for accelerated schools. Gathering and synthesis of these lessons continues to be an ongoing project, as we continue to get reports about districts from both district and accelerated school staff, and others who work with accelerated schools.

Development of a Vision of an Accelerated District

We have begun developing and refining a vision of an "accelerated district," i.e., a district that supports and complements accelerated schools. This vision will be a product of the views of numerous education stakeholders including district and school staff, parents, students and others. The evolving vision will serve as a benchmark around which we can evaluate our models.

The process of developing this vision has already gone through three important steps. In the Fall 1994, staff of the National Center spent time synthesizing our own vision of such a district. Then, in a December meeting with representatives from Bay Area accelerated schools, we obtained their views on a vision of an accelerated district; and most recently we gained input from both district and school leadership during our design team meetings in April (see below). While our vision will serve as a guide to the development of the models, we also see the development of the vision itself as an unfinished work, a vision that will continue to be modified and kept vital through iterations of development by stakeholders.

Research on School Districts Attempting to Change

One important area of work for the Winter 1995 has been to research district change efforts in a variety of districts, including those with no accelerated schools. The purpose of this work is to gain further information on the process and parameters of district change.

The successes and failures of specific reforms have begun to suggest favorable strategies as well as those to be avoided.

· Our work to date in this area has focused on locales that have attempted some form of decentralization or school based management effort system wide, because these efforts underscore the need for districts to support increased decision making at schools. Therefore we have carefully reviewed studies about Chicago, Kentucky, Dade County, and San Diego, among others. To date our research has provided little, if any, evidence that districts have attempted the kind of full district-wide transformation that we envision for accelerated districts.

Application of Organization Theory to Models

During the past six months, we have spent time reviewing organization theory and applications to further inform our models. Among the theories and applications that we have considered are Neo-Institutional theory (e.g., Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Weick 1976; applications e.g., Rowan 1982, Banskton, 1982) Resource Dependency theory (e.g., Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; applications e.g., Barnett, 1984; Firestone, 1989) and Contingency theory (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967; Galbraith 1973; applications e.g., Friedkin and Necochea, 1988; Carnoy, et al., 1994). We have begun also communicating with organization theorists at Stanford to further inform our models. In addition, we are communicating with business consultants to learn more about reforms in other types of organizations.

Our research into the area of organizational theory has broadened our view of how we might look at districts. It has also raised some important questions that strike at the heart of the project. For example, one theorist emphasized in discussion a simple criterion for model evaluation: the degree to which any given model of an Accelerated District improves the lives of people who work in a school district, and the children that go to a district's schools. Will people be better off by what we do? The idea here is that we

should not lose sight of how change can affect people's lives – both in positive and negative ways. Although we expect that our the results of our efforts will be positive for those affected, it was useful to hear another voice of caution. The same theorist also suggested we consider the minimum size of districts as a way of assessing the limits to district reform. These two examples and many others suggest that our research and conversations on organization theory have proven useful.

The Development of Initial Models

Building on our work with San Jose to develop a model, as well as all our research described above, we have further developed a set of initial models of Accelerated Districts. These first three models are described in summary form on the pages that follow. We call these initial models "Phases" because they suggest a somewhat linear progression from relatively small steps showing district support for accelerated schools, in Phase 1, to full-scale district transformation in Phase 3. By this culminating phase, a district will be using the Accelerated Schools philosophy, and an analogous process to re-shape its own work so that district operations fully complement the activities taking place in their accelerated schools.

Phase I
Learning And Exploring

In this initial phase, district leadership will develop stronger district support for its accelerated schools, by going beyond minimum requirements of support such as having trained coaches. By the end of Phase I more district staff will have in-depth knowledge about the accelerated schools philosophy and process and the changes taking place at their accelerated schools. Activities in this phase are more specified than in other phases, because some districts are already carrying out specific and successful Phase I activities that other districts may wish to adopt.

Some Possible Phase I Activities

The Phase I Accelerated District:

- Establishes an accelerated schools steering committee exclusively designed to support and enable accelerated schools to succeed and eventually to lead to changes in the district's own operations.

- Is sensitive to school staffing needs as in moving (or not moving) principals and dealing with issues such as staff hiring and /or layoffs.

- Gives central office personnel time to attend accelerated school site staff development. activities and governance meetings.

- Empowers schools, giving them greater breadth in decision-making.

Phase II
Building a Foundation

In Phase II, the Accelerated District builds further support among all district departments and offices, in preparation for implementing the accelerated district process in Phase III. Further buy-in and initial implementation activities involving all district departments and key personnel occurs in Phase II, including initial training activities.

Some Possible Phase II Activities

The Phase II Accelerated District:

- Proactively arranges for the following categories of managers to have leadership training based on the philosophy and process of accelerated schools and current organizational behavior research, so that they can become active change agents in the district transformation. Potential groups for participation include:

    - ∞ Middle managers in district departments
    - ∞ Cabinet members
    - ∞ Board members
    - ∞ School Principals and Assistant Principals
    - ∞ Union representatives

- Builds on the lessons learned from its Accelerated Schools Steering Committee, and staffing and principal selection procedures to make actual changes in district policy in order to support accelerated schools.

- Arranges for small, "vertically sliced" groups of employees to begin examining different issues, through the lenses of the accelerated schools philosophy and investigating strengths and challenges of the district.

- Establishes a "clearing house" function for schools, readily offering necessary information and support, as well as serving as a repository of knowledge that exists within the district, and outside of the district, such as current research on powerful learning.

Phase III
Transformation

By the time a district reaches Phase III, much 'pre-buy-in' has occurred along the way and it is ready to fully implement the accelerated district process, and continue internalizing the accelerated schools philosophy. In Phase III, accelerated district activities are taking place across all departments and among levels in the district-level operations. At this point, the accelerated district has moved beyond just supporting school site change to actually complementing that change through its own change activities. This phase will be organic – much in the way the accelerated schools philosophy and process leads to 'unknown' changes, resulting from the excitement and energy of each school community.

Some Possible Phase III Activities

The Phase III Accelerated District:

- Uses the accelerated district process and accelerated schools philosophy to do a completely comprehensive, district wide taking stock and vision process.

- Develops a cross-district group to develop a district vision. Sets priorities through a modified forum and establishes cadres with specific focus and initially limited scope of challenges to address.

- Uses collaborative decision making in both the district and the schools

- Works to encourage powerful learning in schools, and risk-taking at the district level, promoting innovation and change at every turn.

V. Creating Models with Practitioners – The District Design Team

The Creation of a Design Team

Recognizing that the design of accelerated district transformation models will remain incomplete, and perhaps of little value, absent collaboration with practitioners, we have formed a District Design Team made up of practitioners in districts across the country.

Practitioners offer critical insights on what is necessary in transforming districts to support accelerated schools. They offer specific knowledge on particulars of their organization, such as its history, structures and politics, as well as relevant aspects of their organizational environment, such as their district's relationship to state agencies, or to the local business community. A purpose of the Design Team then has been to help us identify characteristics generic to all districts, and further our understanding of why their common situations exist as they do. As leaders in innovating districts, Design Team members can also shed light on processes of organizational change and innovation as they occur in the context of school districts.

The Design Team is made up of a collaborative group of representatives from districts from across the country that have a track record of innovation at the district level, and also provide various types of support for their accelerated schools. Based on the need for communication between districts' traditional leadership, its coaches and schools, we required each district team to include representatives from each of these stakeholder groups.

The process for establishing the design team began with a quasi-application. We mailed information about our work on district transformation along with a questionnaire to about thirty-five districts that National and Satellite Center staff had identified as potential design team participants. The questionnaire had two functions: First, it provided additional information about district reform activities. Second, and more importantly, it served as a type of application into the Design Team, by indicating the degree to which a district was willing to innovate, and its interest in the concept of an accelerated district. We then invited a subset of ten districts to join us for the initial Design Team meetings during

two days in April. Eight agreed to come at their own expense, and bring the requisite teams. However, the whole group remains on our database for possible future work and research. Subsequently, we sent the Design Team members a packet of information that summarized our research work to date.[1]

The Design Team Meetings

Our first Design Team meetings took place on April 6 and 7. The agenda for the two days was roughly divided into two main areas – understanding the realities of school district, and working towards designs of accelerated districts. On the first day Design Team members described their experiences with reform in districts and attempted to illuminate the specific characteristics that made these reforms either successful or unsuccessful. Then participants began the process of developing a map of stakeholders, and outlines of district structure and key functions. The first day concluded as participants discussed internal and external pressuring factors on districts, and how they addressed these pressures.

On the second day, the Design Team members discussed the need for change in their districts, and developed ideas for an accelerated district vision. Then they critiqued the models that National Center staff had developed (see above). The Design Team members spent most of the remainder of the second day modifying the National Center models and/or developing their own models for district transformation. Finally, National Center staff and Design Team members jointly discussed next steps for this project. In sum, while the discussions were often times difficult and complex, most participants felt that this undertaking was crucial to the institutionalization of changes at accelerated schools,

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[1] This packet, which includes summaries of reports from dozens of school district personnel, as well as summaries of relevant research studies, and case studies of reforms in Chicago, Kentucky and elsewhere, is available upon request at the cost of production and mailing.

and to important improvements in the functioning of districts. Nearly all looked forward to a continuation of the Design Team and the development of accelerated district models.

Key Results from the Meetings

Several important conclusions emerged from the two days of meetings. Here is a sample of some that we found critical to our future work.

- "Accelerated district" models of district transformation should build on the current work that is taking place in districts to change their operations, and build on the strengths of these change efforts. Our models must legitimately acknowledge this current work of district staff, recognize the investment in these efforts and capitalize on it. We must try to avoid the possibility that current district change efforts will end up being a hindrance to our efforts at creating an accelerated district.

- More generally, our models should be flexible enough to accommodate the variety of district histories and experiences with change. In this regard we should continue to research what makes district reform successful or not, so that we can cull out generic elements that can be incorporated into our models.

- We need to be very cautious about even using the term "Accelerated" or "Accelerated District," because imposition of a label may connote that those at the top of a district have *decreed* the reform will take place. This can backfire in terms of obtaining ownership from the vast majority of district staff. On the other hand, we should be clear that our models ought to retain the accelerated schools philosophy, and have an analogous, albeit more flexible, process for districts to transform their operations.

- It remains unclear what the real constraints of districts actually *are*. In many instances, what appeared as a real constraint to some practitioners appeared to others as surmountable with maneuvering and creativity. In addition, a willingness to test the existence of constraints sometimes resulted in a changed perception that there really was no constraint. Therefore we need to continue to inquire what districts really can and cannot do in terms of organization and functions, and which constraints to organization and functions are perceived and which are real.

- Long time district and school staff have developed fairly explicit and long term strategies to accomplish change in their districts. They are also shrewd when it comes to negotiating politically complex situations. Design Team members clearly showed at this first meeting that they have the political and organizational skills necessary to create district transformation – given sufficient time, resources and a workable process for district change.

- It is worthwhile to initiate discussions with other known reform movements to see if collaboration is possible, as well as to share learning about districts, and to continue discussions with other practitioners.

These results and others have helped to shape our future work in developing models for accelerated districts. It is worth noting that these lessons were similar to and complemented our own learning from our work with San Jose. In the next section we outline our next steps on this project, which, sadly, are largely contingent on foundation support. Among our immediate steps is to seek funding to continue and expand this research and design effort, in anticipation of eventual implementation of accelerated district models with a set of districts.

VI. Future Steps

As noted just above, an important next step is to seek funding for the continued research and design of accelerated district models. We have recognized that in order to complete development of these models, we will require consistent resources and staff for the next several years. In addition, there are other steps that we intend to take within the immediate future. We are now developing and will soon complete a summary report of the first Design Team meeting. This report will be sent to the Design Team members and subsequently we will solicit their feedback on the report. The Design Team discussions were extremely rich and useful for developing models, so the purpose of the report is to assure that we have accurately captured the variety of perspectives and ideas from these meetings. We have also assured Design Team members that we will have ongoing conversations with them over the next few months as we continue our research efforts.

Contingent on funding, there are four much broader goals we hope to reach through a set of specific activities over the next two years. For the next year, we have two general goals:

Design a set of "Accelerated District" models. These models will retain the accelerated schools philosophy, but be flexible enough in terms of their process for change, to accommodate the variety of district organizations, histories and stakeholders. In addition rather than creating just one model, we hope to create a set of models among which districts can choose that offer varying degrees of transformation. We expect the models that we develop in this first year to be generic, i.e., they will exhibit a process of change that is culled from what we have consistently found to be successful in district change efforts. These models will be developed as we carry out additional research into the change process, and through ongoing in-person and other communications with Design Team members and other districts that have carried out district change efforts.

Lay the groundwork for collaboration on implementation of models with a small group of districts. During the next year we will continue to develop our relationships with Design Team members, with the expectation that a small subset – perhaps three or four – of these districts will consider collaboration on implementation. We will also identify other districts who may have an interest in collaboration during the next year. Among our activities will be site visits to various districts, communication over the phone, and, most likely, additional Design Team meetings to get input from members as we refine the models.

By the end of the second year (the 1996-1997 school year) of this research and design project – we hope to approach the point of implementation in collaboration with the subset of districts. Again we have two general goals to reach this point:

Identify a limited subset of districts to develop district specific models of transformation. Based on our work during 1995-1996, we will carry out meetings with key stakeholders in a limited number of districts, in order to identify potential partners for collaboration. This identification will have taken within the first few months of the second year, so that we can formalize relationships with a small subset who wish to pursue implementation of an accelerated district model.

Collaboration with a limited subset of districts to tailor and refine the models. We will work with each of these districts to refine one of the 'generic' models so that it becomes a *district specific* model that is suitable for implementation in that district. All of our research and experience to date point to the need to have very flexible models of district transformation. The Design Team meetings underscored the need to have models that accommodate the particular people, histories and structures of given districts, and that capitalize on the expertise of long time staff of those districts to create change. For these

reasons, we will work with each identified district to craft a district specific model that is founded on the generic models of transformation that we develop in the previous year.

Conclusion

The Accelerated District Project is just in its infancy as we are now only at the stage of researching how change takes place in districts, and just beginning to design models of change. We at the National Center find this work to be truly exciting and invigorating. We hope and expect that our efforts will similarly revitalize school districts and the people who work in districts. Moreover, we expect our research efforts will further demonstrate the complexity of school districts and the organization of public education generally in this country; and we hope to be able to design useful models of district change that will take account of these complexities. We also hope that our design and eventual implementation of models with courageous leaders from a few school districts will help to show the variety of *alternatives* to the organization of districts and public education as well. More importantly, we hope that these pioneering efforts will lead to widespread district transformation that positively affects all who work in district offices, schools, and ultimately, the children of the district.

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